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## **Update on UNHCR operations in the Middle East and North Africa**

### **A. Situational analysis including new developments**

#### *Syrian displacement situation*

The conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic, currently in its twelfth year, has produced one of the largest displacement crises in the world. Over 5.5 million Syrian refugees continue to be generously hosted by neighbouring countries, in the midst of worsening local socioeconomic conditions. Anti-refugee rhetoric has been observed in some of the host countries, with increased calls for their return home. Preliminary findings of the tenth vulnerability assessment of Syrian refugees in Lebanon in 2022 show a sharp decline in living conditions for Syrian refugees – with ninety per cent of families living in extreme poverty and in critical need of assistance to survive. The vulnerabilities of Syrian refugees, alongside host communities, are likely to worsen in 2023.

Refugee returns to the Syrian Arab Republic from neighbouring countries are expected to fluctuate and will be significantly impacted by the security situation inside the country of origin. Around 51,000 refugees opted to return in 2022, a slight increase compared to previous years. Syrian refugees have the highest resettlement needs globally, with over 777,000 Syrians identified as being in need of resettlement. Resettlement remains a critical test of burden- and responsibility-sharing by the international community.

Inside the Syrian Arab Republic, significant humanitarian needs persist. According to the 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview, 15.3 million people are in need of assistance, representing an increase from 14.6 million people in 2022. This includes people living in the north-west, who continue to benefit from the cross-border response from Gaziantep, following the renewal of United Nations Security Council resolution 2672 (2023). UNHCR will continue to provide a range of assistance to refugees, internally displaced persons and returnees. It will also focus on building self-reliance and reducing protection risks through community-based networks. UNHCR continues to co-lead the protection, shelter, and camp coordination and camp management clusters in response to the internal displacement situation.

UNHCR co-leads with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan in response to the Syrian refugee crisis, coordinating the work of more than 270 partners in support of national efforts in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Türkiye. The Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan will continue to connect the humanitarian response with longer-term national strategies for inclusive growth and sustainable development.

### *Iraq displacement situation*

The work of UNHCR in Iraq is transitioning from emergency response to a longer-term development approach. As of 2023, the clusters set up to address internal displacement have been deactivated and the Humanitarian Response Plan will be discontinued, in line with the humanitarian country team's decision to phase out the humanitarian response for internally displaced persons and to focus on durable solutions under the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework. UNHCR and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights will co-lead the newly formed Protection Platform, which informs and provides strategic guidance and technical support to partners under the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework.

Iraq continues to face protracted economic, political and security challenges. UNHCR will seek to further enhance the protection environment of persons of concern by strengthening their economic and social well-being. The remaining needs of internally displaced persons and returnee populations in 2023 and beyond will be addressed through an area-based development approach rather than driven by the displacement status of the individuals concerned. UNHCR will also shift its support towards strengthening the capacities of public institutions to deliver accessible and quality services, to facilitate livelihood opportunities, and to address destroyed or damaged property and critical infrastructure. UNHCR will continue to help address access to civil documentation for internally displaced persons and returnees.

### *North Africa*

The security situation in Libya remains complex, with periodic hostilities between armed groups and local militias. Despite peace talks supported by the United Nations, a roadmap for holding presidential elections remains indeterminate. Between January and December 2022, the number of internally displaced persons fell from some 179,000 to 135,000 individuals, while the number of previously internally displaced persons who returned home rose from some 662,000 to 695,500. By the end of 2022, the number of refugees and asylum-seekers in Libya stood at over 40,000. Despite a restrictive operating environment, UNHCR continues to provide critical protection services to displaced persons at its Community Day Centre, while also ensuring life-saving assistance at detention centres and disembarkation points. In 2022, over 2,200 vulnerable persons departed to safety emergency evacuations, resettlement and complementary pathways – which will remain a priority.

While primarily a country of transit, some 9,500 asylum-seekers are currently known to be living in Tunisia. Rescue and interception at sea increased by 34 per cent compared to 2021. UNHCR will continue to provide targeted protection assistance to displaced persons, including those rescued at sea, while prioritizing the socioeconomic inclusion of refugees and asylum-seekers, including access to livelihoods, health care and education.

Egypt hosts over 290,000 refugees and asylum-seekers from different nationalities, primarily Syrians. UNHCR will maintain vital services including refugee status determination and resettlement, while engaging with the authorities to ensure that people in need of international protection are identified and protected in Egypt. Engagement with national counterparts will be reinforced with the aim of facilitating refugee inclusion in national social protection systems and livelihood opportunities.

In Algeria, UNHCR undertakes registration and refugee status determination in urban areas, while continuing to advocate for freedom of movement and the right to liberty and security of person, and to ensure that people in need of international protection are identified and protected in Algeria. Ongoing mixed movements resulted in a 21 per cent increase in the urban population of asylum-seekers in 2022, with some 3,100

individuals newly registered and mainly from the Syrian Arab Republic. Despite chronic underfunding, UNHCR will aid 90,000 Sahrawi refugees living in the camps near Tindouf, notably in the sectors of education, livelihoods, health and hygiene, while working with the World Food Programme and partners to address severe food shortages that are driving malnutrition levels in the camps.

Morocco remains both a destination and a transit point for mixed movements. While sea crossings along the western Mediterranean Sea and north-west Africa maritime routes fell by 29 per cent in 2022, renewed crossing attempts into Melilla resulted in multiple deaths, injuries and arrests. With over 18,000 registered refugees and asylum-seekers of concern to UNHCR in Morocco, the Office will continue to ensure vital protection services, including registration, refugee status determination, legal assistance and emergency housing. It will also provide comprehensive support for survivors of gender-based violence and access to vocational training and income generating activities.

In Mauritania, UNHCR will continue to undertake registration and refugee status determination for new arrivals, identifying individuals with specific needs for targeted assistance in Mbera camp and urban areas, including psychosocial counselling and cash assistance to cover basic needs. As large-scale returns to Mali are not anticipated in 2023, UNHCR continues to build refugee resilience according to the Government of Mauritania's policy of inclusion, while strengthening engagement with development actors to reinforce national capacities.

#### *Gulf Cooperation Council*

Resource mobilization activities continued across the region of the Gulf Cooperation Council, raising \$41.6 million from government and over \$45 million from private donors in 2022. Overall, government funding fell by 25 per cent compared to 2021. Cooperation with the Islamic Development Bank saw the launch of the Global Islamic Fund for Refugees, which provides development and humanitarian assistance to address displacement crises through fundraising that is compliant with the Islamic Shariah Principles.

#### *Israel*

Israel hosts some 26,500 refugees and asylum-seekers, mainly from Eritrea and the Sudan, in addition to an estimated 35,000 Ukrainians who arrived since February 2022. As part of its protection response, UNHCR ensures access to rights and essential services for persons seeking asylum as well as capacity-building for the authorities and other stakeholders on refugee status determination and guidance on individual cases. Responding to and preventing gender-based violence remains a priority, in addition to improving access to education, livelihoods and health care.

#### *Yemen*

The political and security landscape in Yemen remains complex and uncertain. Following a welcomed ceasefire in April 2022 which held for seven months, efforts continue towards identifying a sustainable political settlement between the parties to the conflict. In 2022, the number of internally displaced persons reached more than 4.3 million, 75 per cent of whom were women and children. The dire economic situation is characterized by rising inflation, owing to currency devaluation, high costs of fuel and essential goods, and the ongoing blockade, with over 78 per cent of the population living below the poverty line. Despite this, the country hosts more than 97,318 refugees and asylum-seekers, mainly from Ethiopia and Somalia, many of whom face arrest, detention, forcible transfer across parts of the country, and expulsion.

UNHCR will continue to provide critical protection services targeting both the newly displaced as well as those living in a situation of protracted displacement. The provision of legal assistance, including in relation to civil status documentation and registration, will be prioritized, in addition to psychosocial counselling and the referral of vulnerable cases to specialized services. Cash assistance will remain a critical protection tool, though it has been reduced due to underfunding. While durable solutions remain elusive, the resumption of the UNHCR voluntary repatriation programme for Somali refugees will support an estimated 1,500 refugees and asylum-seekers to return home in 2023. Over 600 individuals returned voluntarily by boat in 2022.

#### *Mixed and onwards movements*

In North Africa, UNHCR operations continued to strengthen the identification of people with international protection needs. In 2022, some 32,000 newly arrived asylum-seekers were registered by UNHCR in the region, with the largest groups being from Mali, the Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic. Of these, 44 per cent were children, 23 per cent were women and 33 per cent were men.

Following an attempt to cross the sea to Europe from North Africa, some 24,800 refugees and migrants were disembarked in Libya after rescue or interception. This represented a decrease of 23 per cent compared to 2021, despite a slight increase in the number of people attempting to cross the sea from Libya. Further rescues and interceptions were also conducted by the authorities of other North African States, while sea arrivals to Yemen more than doubled compared to 2021.

At least some 2,200 refugees and migrants are known to have died at sea on routes between North Africa and Europe in 2022. The central Mediterranean route was the deadliest, accounting for 61 per cent of these deaths.

Against a backdrop of increasingly difficult conditions for refugees in some parts of the region, further onward movements were observed. There was an increase of over 200 per cent in attempts to cross the sea to Europe from Lebanon, mostly by Syrians. Others travelled by air to Libya and then attempted to cross the sea to Europe. UNHCR continued to conduct extensive outreach and communications with communities to advise refugees about the risks involved in such journeys and to encourage them to contact UNHCR and partners to see how their protection and assistance concerns could be addressed in the region.

## **B. Progress and challenges by impact area in 2022 and updated plans for 2023**

#### *Attaining a favourable protection environment*

In 2022, almost 200,000 individuals were newly registered with UNHCR across the region, a 60 per cent increase compared to 2021 and following the easing of restrictions related to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19). Of these, 52 per cent were Syrian. UNHCR operations continue to use in-person and hybrid procedures to ensure access to persons of concern, reduce backlogs and carry out verification exercises, while ensuring data quality and data protection.

UNHCR continued to conduct refugee status determination under its mandate in 17 of the 18 countries in the region. Refugee status determination remains a critical protection tool, ensuring access to rights and assistance, and facilitating solutions. Country operations in the region strengthened refugee status determination activities following the COVID-19 pandemic and reviewed related strategies to realign them with current realities. UNHCR published relevant country guidance and country of

origin information to adjudicators, including the updated guidance on the internal flight or relocation alternative in Iraq. New eligibility guidance on Iraq and country of origin information on the situation of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon will be issued in 2023.

In 2023, UNHCR will continue to undertake an array of measures to prevent and reduce statelessness and to identify and protect stateless communities. This includes the provision of legal assistance, support to authorities in issuing civil documentation, studies informing evidence-based interventions, capacity-building and advocacy. UNHCR collaborates with governments and other stakeholders to make advancements in this area. Examples include arranging an Arabic language course on preventing statelessness and a regional meeting to advance gender-equal nationality rights.

In 2023, learning events related to accountability to affected populations and towards community-led organizations will be facilitated and fostered. Access to social protection systems will be promoted through support to governments, research and communication with communities.

#### *Realizing rights in safe environments*

There are around 2.2 million school-aged persons of concern in the region, affected by complex protection challenges, school dropouts and limited future prospects for employment. COVID-19 continues to impact learning, protection and the socioeconomic situation. In response, UNHCR works with governments and partners to strengthen national systems, address barriers to access and engage in learning, and support for the safe return to schools and retention in learning through remedial programmes.

In 2023, UNHCR continues to strengthen its child protection responses to violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect, including child labour and child marriage. By the end of September 2022, over 124,000 children in Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey benefited from specialized services, while nearly 94,000 children participated in structured child protection and psychosocial support programmes. Close to 66,000 women and men benefited from parenting support. Collaboration with the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the International Organization for Migration advanced through the Blueprint for Joint Action for Refugee Children, while collaboration continued to support youth and children affected by the Syrian crisis, towards the “no lost generation” initiative.

#### *Empowering communities and achieving gender equality*

UNHCR remains committed to ensuring accountability to affected populations, enhancing social cohesion and strengthening the participation of communities in the decisions that affect their lives. Two regional learning sessions on accountability to affected populations organized by UNHCR helped equip staff and partners with the required skills and knowledge. A grant provided in the context of accountability to affected populations helped empower women in Mbera refugee camp, Mauritania.

A digital participatory tool increased qualitative protection analysis in Algeria, Egypt, Mauritania and Morocco, while call centres in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Libya responded to over 2 million calls, enhancing community engagement and programme planning. Seventy members of the regional Community Protection Network attended learning events which covered topics such as communication with communities and the identification of protection risks. In North Africa and in Lebanon, outreach on issues such as the dangers of attempting onward movements and the use of cash assistance to meet essential needs helped enhance two-way communication. A UNHCR learning programme on disability inclusion was

launched with the collaboration of the International Disability Alliance and the participation of governments and communities.

With the support of the PROSPECTS partnership for improving prospects for forcibly displaced persons and host communities,<sup>1</sup> UNHCR will launch a regional toolkit to facilitate work on accountability to affected populations and provide grants to community and grassroots organizations.

Preventing, mitigating and responding to gender-based violence remains a priority for the region. In 2022, over 158,800 survivors and persons at risks of gender-based violence benefited from an array of services through the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan for Syrian refugees. Despite these efforts, more work remains to be done to remove the barriers that prevent survivors from having full access to services, including access to health care, protection and justice. Between January and September 2023, some 154,300 persons also benefited from prevention activities through the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan. Based on the regional analysis of gaps and needs, and in line with the organization's policy on the prevention and response to gender-based violence of 2020, UNHCR undertook capacity development activities, including on case management and access to critical services. Funding from the Safe from the Start initiative contributed to the implementation of the policy, and support was provided to the Syrian situation operations through the temporary deployment of a roving senior protection officer. In Algeria, financial support from the initiative helped provide safe shelter for survivors.

In 2023, operations in the region will continue prioritizing the prevention of sexual abuse and exploitation, including through the review, development and circulation of communications material, the roll-out of training initiatives and the assessment of capacities of UNHCR partners in this area. Limited resources, including the lack of specialized staff, are impacting the ability of the operations to ensure regular training for all staff and sufficient support to partners.

#### *Securing solutions*

In 2022, UNHCR submitted the cases of over 24,400 refugees for resettlement from the region – an increase of around 19 per cent compared to 2021. In addition, the cases of some 20,400 individuals (17,000 of whom were Syrians) were submitted from Türkiye. An estimated 880,000 refugees in the region and in Türkiye are in need of resettlement in 2023.

UNHCR is committed to preventing fraud in these processes. In 2023, UNHCR will continue to ensure oversight in this area through the application of the anti-fraud policy together with the regional Integrity Working Group and the regional Integrity Community of Practice.

Working with States and partners, UNHCR expanded access to complementary pathways. This was accomplished with support from the regional Contact Group for Complementary Pathways. This group, which has over 100 representatives from States, non-governmental organizations, academia and UNHCR operations, launched a digital platform in 2022 to allow members to further develop partnerships and to share knowledge about complementary pathways.

Between 2016 and 2022, some 354,000 Syrian refugees returned home from Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Türkiye. Despite this, the number of returns from Iraq and Jordan decreased compared to 2021, and the number of those returning is still far

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<sup>1</sup> Known as PROSPECTS, this partnership is funded by the Netherlands and brings together the International Finance Corporation, the International Labour Organization, UNHCR, UNICEF and the World Bank, with the aim of improving access of the displaced and host communities to employment and livelihood opportunities.

below the levels seen prior to the pandemic. UNHCR and partners maintained and strengthened preparedness and planning for returns, guided by the Comprehensive Protection and Solutions Strategy and the Global Compact on Refugees. In the Syrian Arab Republic, UNHCR provides returning refugees and other vulnerable populations with humanitarian assistance and other services through a network of community centres. In parallel, dialogue is underway with the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic and other stakeholders to address obstacles to voluntary return.

*Mobilizing public, political, financial and operational support through strategic partnerships*

UNHCR will continue to focus on expanding and strengthening partnerships and advocacy with stakeholders, in line with the “whole of society” approach advocated in the Global Compact on Refugees. In addition to bringing together national and local governments, civil society, financial and development institutions, the private sector and academia, the inclusion of refugee-led organizations and refugee communities is critical. In the region, UNHCR is working to advance inclusive policies ahead of the Global Refugee Forum in December 2023. It will continue to engage regional organizations, such as the League of Arab States, and other partners, including those participating in the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan for Syrian refugees, in this endeavour.

Drawing on the recommendations from the regional preparatory roundtable for the High Commissioner’s Dialogue held in November 2022, and in line with the Office’s Strategic Directions (2022-2026), UNHCR will strengthen development cooperation to further facilitate inclusion in national systems in the region. Operations across the region are actively engaging in the collection of socioeconomic data, poverty analysis and evidence-based programming through the World Bank-UNHCR Joint Data Center on Forced Displacement. This work aims, in particular, to facilitate programming and inclusion in the areas of education, health, social protection and livelihoods.

The regional consultations with non-governmental organizations in 2023 will focus on the themes of inclusion, livelihoods and engagement in the Global Refugee Forum. To promote localization and the inclusion of local actors and refugees, UNHCR will work with the regional Civil Society Network for Displacement, comprised of actors that deliver a wide range of services and responses to the needs of displaced persons and host communities. The Civil Society Network for Displacement participates in the Reference Group for the Global Refugee Forum 2023 and will facilitate civil society engagement in the development of pledges and initiatives.

UNHCR’s Islamic philanthropy programme remains the largest income driver for private sector partnerships in the region, with a diverse portfolio of donors especially from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. The Islamic philanthropy programme, including the global Ramadan Campaign and the Refugee Zakat Fund, contributed \$34.6 million in 2022 (90 per cent of this income came directly from the region). This brings the total contributed through these sources to more than \$189 million since 2017. This income includes both Zakat (obligatory charity in Islam) and Sadaqah (voluntary charity in Islam), with Zakat contributing 80 per cent of the total Islamic philanthropy income. Overall, fundraising efforts by UNHCR in 2022 yielded income of \$49.36 million, 55.5 per cent of which was earmarked for operations in the region.

### **C. Financial information**

The current 2023 budget of \$2.37 billion for the region is less than the 2022 original budget of \$2.43 billion, representing a 3 per cent decrease, driven by the significant reductions for Iraq.

As of 31 January 2023, some 10 per cent of the region's 2023 financial requirements are funded, taking into consideration the indicative allocation of unearmarked and softly earmarked contributions.

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